

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

**Remarks Following a Meeting With North Atlantic Treaty Organization
Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen**

September 29, 2009

President Obama. Hello, everybody. I just want to welcome Secretary General Rasmussen to the Oval Office. He and I had the opportunity to get to know each other at the NATO summit in Strasbourg, at which he was nominated and then selected as the new Secretary General of NATO.

I can say that given his experience as a head of state, that everybody had confidence in his decisive and effective leadership abilities. That confidence has proven justified. In the brief time that he has been in NATO, I think he's already shown himself to be an active and effective Secretary General, interested in reforming and renewing the NATO alliance and always rooted in the understanding that this is the most successful military alliance in history and the cornerstone of transatlantic relationships.

We had a very fruitful discussion while he was here. We talked about, obviously, the most important NATO mission right now, and that is Afghanistan. And we both agree that it is absolutely critical that we are successful in dismantling, disrupting, destroying the Al Qaida network, and that we are effectively working with the Afghan Government to provide the security necessary for that country.

This is not a American battle; this is a NATO mission as well. And we are working actively and diligently to consult with NATO at every step of the way. And I'm very grateful for the leadership that Secretary General Rasmussen has shown in committing NATO to a full partnership in this process.

We also discussed missile defense, and we both agreed that the configuration that we have proposed is one that, ultimately, will serve the interests of not only the United States but also NATO alliance members most effectively. It allows for a full collaboration with NATO members, and we are very optimistic that it will achieve our aims and deal with the very real threat of ballistic missiles.

We also agree that it is important for us to reach out to Russia and explore ways in which the missile defense configurations that we envision could potentially lead to further collaboration with Russia on this front, and that we want to improve generally not only U.S.-Russian relations but also NATO-Russian relations, while making absolutely clear that our commitments to all of our allies in NATO is sacrosanct and that our commitment to Article 5 continues.

Finally, we discussed the process that we're putting forward for a strategic concept review. NATO has been so successful that sometimes, I think, that we forget this was shaped and crafted for a 20th century landscape. We're now well into the 21st century, and that means that we are going to have to constantly renew and revitalize NATO to meet current threats and not just past threats.

There has been a process that has been put forward; we are fully supportive of it. I am confident that under Secretary General Rasmussen's leadership that it will ultimately be successful, and that we will continue to see NATO operate in a way that is good for U.S. national security interests, good for our allies, and good for the world.

So, Mr. Secretary General, thank you for the excellent work that you're doing, and we appreciate it very much. And please feel free to share a few words.

Secretary General Rasmussen. Thank you very much, Mr. President, for your kind words. The President and I have had a very constructive meeting. I have thanked the President for his strong support. I look very much forward to cooperating with the President and his administration on reforming, transforming, and modernizing NATO. We are going to elaborate a new strategic concept, which I hope can serve as leverage for renewal of NATO.

Of course, our main focus today has been our cooperation in Afghanistan. I say "our" focus deliberately, because our operation in Afghanistan is not America's responsibility or burden alone. It is and it will remain a team effort. I agree with President Obama in his approach: strategy first, then resources. The first thing is not numbers; it is to find and fine-tune the right approach to implement the strategy already laid down. And all NATO allies are right now looking at McChrystal's review.

I'm convinced that success in Afghanistan is achievable and will be achieved. And don't make any mistake: The normal discussion on the right approach should not be misinterpreted as lack of resolve. This alliance will stand united, and we will stay in Afghanistan as long as it takes to finish our job.

As the President mentioned, we have all—also discussed missile defense. I welcome the new U.S. approach, which will allow all allies to participate, which will protect all allies. And in fact, I think the proposed new system can serve as an instrument to bind all allies, new and old, even stronger together.

Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you so much. All right, thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:09 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Secretary General Rasmussen referred to Lt. Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, USA, commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan.

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